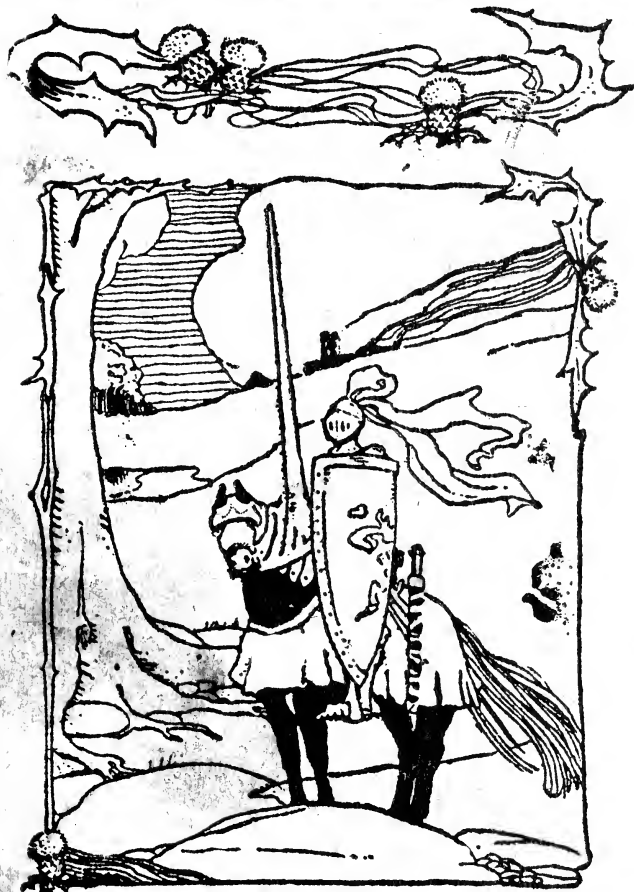


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ROBERT of KINCAID



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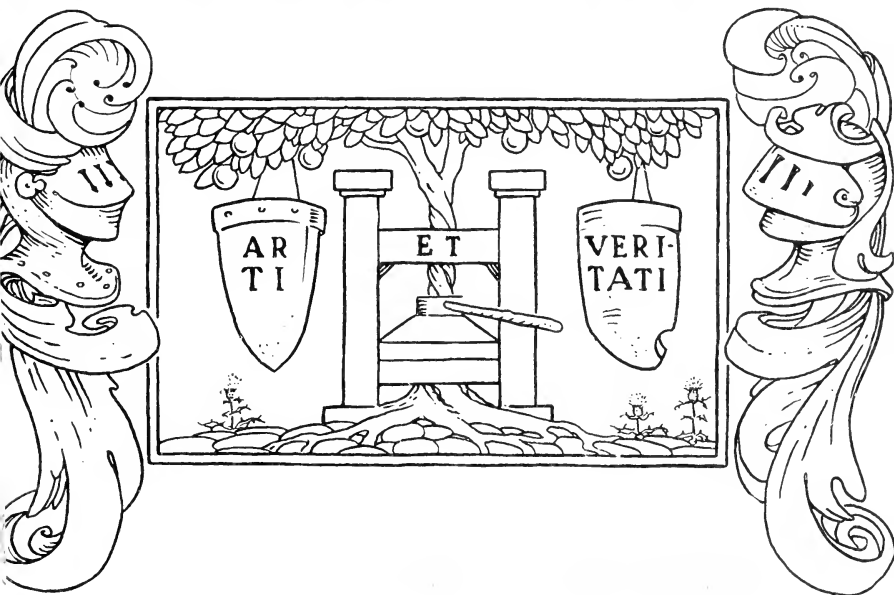
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ROBERT of KINCAID



Boston: Richard G. Badger

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TO THE CURIOUS

For a writer to trespass within the territory of a master may appear little less than criminal; and to choose for his field of action, a land whose every hill and dale, whose mountains, lochs and torrents still echo on a clear dawn with the tender songs of a Burns; or as the twilight fades into dusk, throng with the romantic and knightly legends of a Scott, may seem to invite criticism and provoke comparisons whose sweetness is like unto gall.

But the writer is less guilty than he looks. That William, the Eighth Earl of Douglas, was born in Scotland in the fifteenth century, can not with reason be charged to the misdeeds of the author, nor should he be expected to apologize for the circumstances of a Scottish birth. Blame history, not the writer!

When men love and hate, when they thirst for power and fame, time and locality, if their blood be red, become as incidents, stage settings as it were. Courage that can laugh down defeat, inspires the heart, whether it illuminates the throne of an Eastern Satrap or is obscured in a Pennsylvania coal mine. So it is men, more than places, that the writer has sought to portray; wounded hearts, baffled ambitions, more than romantic scenery; rather the dark solitudes of the mind than the secret dungeons of a mediæval castle.

Robert of Kincaid

PART I

I

In Lorna's glen there dwelt a band
That long had cursed the iron hand
Of Douglas' rule and longed to overthrow
A clan whose power they ill could know.
The hills they once had ranged at will,
The mountain streams that knew their skill,
The darkest glen where quarry lie,
No longer see their tartans fly,
No longer with their voices ring,
No longer hear their arrows sing;
For Douglas' haughty earl forbade
Them pass beyond their native glade.
What eagle loves his gilded cage?
What lion can repress his rage
When bars of steel hedge round his pride?
Who binds the wind or stems the tide?
What recked they now as freeborn men
That Lorna's was the richest glen
In all of Perth? What cared their chief
What Glasgow tradesmen paid for beef?

II

Of all the clan in that fair glade,
Best loved was Robert of Kincaid,
Brave son of him who that fell day
When Lorna made her last foray,

Was captured by the Douglas bold
And held a captive in his hold.
Young Robert loved by youth and maid,
The swiftest foot that trod the glade,
Could not keep pace with Lorna's son;
Each game, each race with ease was won.
Above the middle height he stood,
The lithest youth in all that wood.
With muscles tougher than the oak,
His trusty blade at one sure stroke
Could fell an ox; with single blow
Could lay a three-inch sapling low;
At sixty feet he'd hurl the spear
And drive it through the fleeting deer.
With hair that shamed night's ebon wing,
Fair browed as nymphs the poets sing;
With eye that met each friendly view
Most like Loch Earn's unmeasured blue,
Yet when the long pent storm out broke,
And black waves gleamed with lightning stroke,
Those flashing orbs shot flames of wrath,
When woe to him that barred their path!

Bear, wolf or stag he'd yet to meet
Before whose onslaught he'd retreat,
Or king or knight in coat of mail,
Before whose eye his cheek would pale.
Though far from courts and ways of ease,
His graceful mien could not but please
The most capricious dame or maid
That saw him in his native plaid.

III

When strength and grace unite in one
Of Lorna's youth, her bravest son,
Who'll gauge the havoc 'mongst the fair?
The tenderest heart Fate scarce will spare.

So Ellen Bruce, the Highland's pride,
Did give her hand as Robert's bride.
A year of ease, a year of bliss,
Whose harshest penance was a kiss ;
Forgetful of the world outside,
Contented with his happy bride,
Young Robert lived till that sad day
His father led that last foray
Against old Lorna's ancient foe,
And fell beneath the broadsword's blow.
A captive ta'en by Douglas bold,
Cast into Lanark's gloomy hold

The chieftain's robe on Robert fell,
And wisdom came and cast her spell,
Though not to damp but feed the fire
That burned his heart with vengeful ire.
The months dragged by their weary length,
While well he gauged the Douglas' strength ;
Till on that glorious June day morn,
The glen did echo with the horn,
And Lorna's clan did there convoke
Beneath the ancient council oak ;
While ill-pent rage through each heart runs,
As Lorna mourns her captive sons,
And cursed the law Earl Douglas made
To hem them in their narrow glade.

IV

The trumpets blared, the bugles rang ;
With shout and cheer each clansman sprang
Astride his eager, restless steed,
Grasped well the rein, and then gave heed
To bold young Robert of Kincaid.
With flashing eye the chief surveyed
Each man and youth, before he spoke ;—
“ Too long we've worn the galling yoke

A dastard earl has on us laid;
Too long, oh sons, have we delayed
To raise the cross, unsheathe the knife;
Too long we've stayed the bitter strife!
Like oxen shall we draw the plough?—
Or like yon stag with antlered brow,
Break through the bounds they've round us set,

Lay waste their fields, scale parapet
And castle tower, drive home the blade,
Ere we return to Lorna's glade?"
Out sprang his ponderous gleaming sword,
And matching deed and act to word,
The chieftain said:—"By God I swear
Ere I return to Kincaid's lair,
And noblest wife by man possest,
Who holds her first born on her breast,
Before I see those eyes of blue,
And clasp that form so fair and true,
The southern dolt this arm shall feel,
Shall know the temper of this steel!
Yon sun shall first retrace his path,
Ere I repress my vengeful wrath,
And ere he take his westward bed
Behind Ben Voirlich's sombre head,
Some fated soul with death shall wed!
Now men of Lorna, once as free
As yon proud eagle in yon tree,
Why rot like carrion in a glen?
Come forth and play the part of men;
Like gluttons can you eat and sleep
While Kincaid starves in gloomy keep!
Drive out the Southron and his law,
His carcass feed the vulture's maw!
If one there be in all this band
Who shrinks to take the blade in hand,
Dismount, I say, and ne'er be seen

Till grass on Kincaid's grave is green—
Who swears the oath, who bides with me?"

V

Three score of blades flashed bright and free,
Three score of blades cross then and there,
And three score voices vengeance swear.
Huzzas for Kincaid then went round,
Till distant hills gave back the sound;
The eagle screamed and wheeled on high,
A fawn that near did hidden lie
Affrighted to its dam did fly;
A lone wolf answered from its hole,
And then lay down and licked its jowl.

VI

Again the signal sharp and shrill,
And three score hearts exultant thrill;
As many steeds the greensward tread,
The youthful chieftain at their head.
They scarce had reached that massive stone
That rears itself like Druid's throne
Just at the edge of Lorna's wood,—
When on its seat a harper stood.
His streaming beard in billows fell,
And gave the scene a mystic spell;
Though countless snows had blanched his hair
And numbed his fingers long and spare,
They scarcely chilled the minstrel's fire
When once he touched his treasured lyre.
With awe and love the clan drew near
To listen to the ancient seer.
In youth he'd served Kincaid's grandsire,
And now the grandson he'd inspire:
With voice that told an earlier day,
The aged minstrel sung this lay;—

VII

THE SONG

The blackcock loves the mountain air,
The red deer loves the leafy glade,
But Lorna's sons have love more fair
In Robert of Kincaid.

They love full well their native glen,
They love the wild rill's dashing foam,
But more than these they love as men
The right to hunt and roam.

Earl Douglas bade us keep our glade,
Nor dare to cross the border line,
We'll let him know we're not afraid,
As on his sheep we dine.

Oh where's the chief so true and bold
With lion heart beneath his plaid,
Who'll dare the Douglas in his hold? —
'Tis Robert of Kincaid.

Oh woe's the hand that smites our chief,
Or harms his bairn or lonely bride,
Oh woe's the hand that brings him grief, —
Its stains be never dried!

VIII

SONG

Oh, advance to the foray,
Advance to the fight;
Oh the robber chief plunder,
The cowardly smite;
But return ere the morrow,
Return ere the night!

Oh the eaglets are taken
When left in the nest;

Oh the doe in the braken
The wolf will molest,
And the house that's forsaken
The thief will infest.

IX

The harper paused ; his mournful eye
Fixed on some vision seen on high ;
A tremor shook his wasted form
As though he felt the coming storm ;
Again his hand caressed the harp,
Now low and sweet, then quick and sharp ;
Until it seemed the strands would break —
Such tones of vengeance they did wake.

X

Oh Douglas, proud Douglas,
Beware of the day
That you slaughter the helpless
As for mercy they pray ;
Look well to the castle
Ere crumbles the clay ;
Think well on thy future,
Think well of to-day,
For the blood that thou sheddest,
Thy own shalt repay !

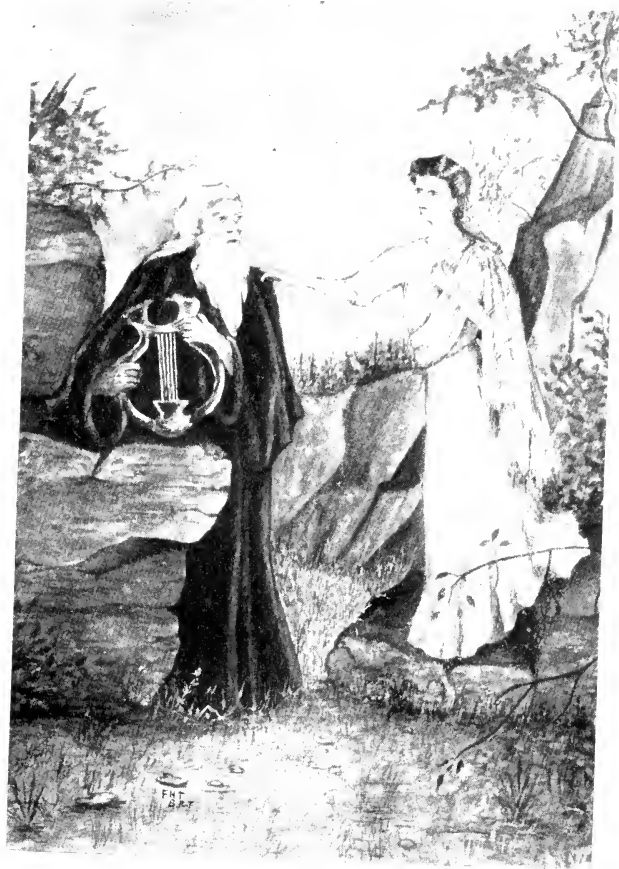
XI

A wild light lit the chieftain's eye,
As if a hoste he did defy ;
With white lips close together pressed
To stem the tumult in his breast,
His right hand did his broadsword grasp,
As though a Douglas it did clasp ; —
And yet no word the chieftain spoke.
Prolonged huzzas the silence broke,

And echoed back from elm and oak ;
Again the bugle's shrill refrain,
Each clansman firmly grasps the rein,
A moment more, the border's crossed,
Deep in the wood the clan are lost.

XII

Bowed o'er his harp, the minstrel stood
Long gazing through the close greenwood ;
When on his arm a hand was laid,
Then spoke a voice as if afraid
To break the reverential spell ;
A voice more sweet than vesper bell,
Ay sweeter than the nightingale
That mourns its mate in lonely vale,
Or plaint of burn that floods the pool
Beneath the moonlight pure and cool.
He slowly turned, when met his gaze
A form beyond the poet's praise,
That baffled all the artist's skill,
And made strong men its slaves at will.
Her blue eyes seemed so cold and pure
No passion could their look endure,
And deeper than the midnight dell,
Unfathomed cast a fatal spell.
Her cheek — more fair than apple's gold
Immortalized by bard of old —
Had that rare whiteness of the snow
Tinged by the winter's sunset glow.
The windblown curls that wreathed her face,
And clothed her with an artless grace,
Though darker than a Viking's shroud,
Were such a queen might well be proud.



XIII

Then spoke the Harper : — “ Daughter, pray
Why from the fold so far away?
Dost thou not know in this wild dale,
Where every tree has its weird tale,
The helpless lamb should never stray
Unguarded thus, an easy prey
To prowling wolf, or lawless band? ”
“ Now, Father, drop thy chiding hand,
Think you that I could slumber when
My Robert was to leave the glen,
On mad foray or some wild raid? —
A Bruce unworthy of Kincaid!
At dawn, his cold lips pressed my cheek,
And numbed with fear I could not speak,
When softly from my couch he crept,
Believing that his Ellen slept;
And stealthily, his leave did take,
Lest wife and babe he should awake.
I lingered o’er that last caress
Too long, then rose and did me dress,
And fearful sought this rocky ledge,
(Dear seat that heard our sacred pledge)
I knew the clansmen here must pass,
Before they crossed the deep morass;

But oh, fond heart, oh stinging fate,
Could not my chief for Ellen wait!
The forest echoed with their cheers,
Each echo bred a thousand fears;
Methought I heard the raven croak
Just as I passed the Druid’s oak;
And when I strove to call my lord,
My lips refused to form a word; —
Say, Father, shall I see that face,
And faint again in his embrace? ”

“ There, daughter, cease thy fears :
Thy babe has need of all these tears, —
Who harms thy chief, him ill betide —
The towering pine falls not alone,
But reaps a swath both long and wide,
While all its kin in anguish moan. —
Come, daughter, when the nursling cries,
The anxious mother nestward flies.”

PART II

I

By noon they'd skirted Uam Var,
Ere dusk they'd forded Vennachar,
And when the stars began to shine
They halted by a blasted pine,
The noblest of a noble wood ;
A century's storms it had withstood.
Then where the scanty grass was green
Within a shelter'd dark ravine,
Each clansman led his weary steed,
And left it well content to feed.
The outposts then the chieftain placed,
Ere to the camp his feet retraced.
Their lengthy fast the next they break,
And silent all the meal partake,
While vagrant thoughts unfettered roam ;
Some peer ahead and some turn home.
The supper done and cleared away,
Some on the sward at full length lay,
Or stretched them 'neath the fragrant pine,
Although to sleep they scarce incline.

II

The loosened tongues were plying fast
With valiant feats done in the past,
When Oswald, eldest of the clan,
Dark browed and wrinkled, scarred and tan,
Who bared alike his stalwart form
To battles' shock or rushing storm,
A man of deeds who seldom spake,
His wonted silence then did break ; —
“ When will the ravens cease to croak
And stale the air with fetid joke ?

Before we yield to slumber's king,
Young Wilfred shall a ballad sing ! ”
A score of voices loudly cry, —
“ Ho, Wilfred, 'tis too late to fly !
Come, let thy voice so clear and strong
Awake the echoes with a song ! ”
The youth arose as he was bid,
And tossing back the curls that hid
A noble brow and eyes whose glance
Outvies the stars that nightly dance
Upon the waves of Loch Achray,
He sang to them this Highland lay.

III

WILFRED'S SONG

Sweet Alice loved a Highland lad,
Young Bertram was his name ;
The old earl spied the telltale plaid
And swore he'd snare the game :
Yet Alice loved her chieftain well —
The Earl vowed if again they meet,
The wedding bell should ring a knell,
And marriage veil be winding sheet.
Oh sweeter far the waters are
Of wild rill on the mountain,
Than lowland stream though statues dream
Beside the sculptured fountain.
Young Bertram has an eye more blue,
His locks a bonnier curl,
His beardless cheek a ruddier hue
Than lowland prince or earl ;
Give him his trusty broadsword bright,
A rock on which to stand,
And he'd defy the bravest knight
That rides about the land.

The jeweled snow alike doth glow
On hut and haughty tower;
And rain doth fall on castle wall
The same as woodland flower.
The old earl locked her in the hold
With deaf John for the warder,
The earl forgot that love was bold —
And Bertram crossed the border;
At dead of night he scaled the tower, —
All peaceful slept the warder —
Then Bertram plucked a Highland flower, —
By dawn, they'd crossed the border.
Oh yoke the cow to lowland plow,
She'll heed the order given,
But not the roe the Highlands know —
For a fawn will not be driven, —
Oh a fawn will not be driven,
Nor a maiden's heart be led,
Though Hell itself had striven
Till she were cold and dead.

IV

“Bravo, well done!” the clansmen cry,
“A curse on earls who dare to try
To thwart the love of lad and maid.
The good greenwood has roof to shade,
And heather is a royal bed
When courage doth with beauty wed.
Now one more song, then saints shall keep
A friendly guard, the while we sleep.”

V

THE SONG

The moon her watch from wooded hill
Upon the lake is keeping;

Within the fold, the flock is still
And the shepherd lad is sleeping.

Oh, huntsman, lay the bow aside,
And sheath the fleeting arrow;
The deer let cool its bleeding side
Within the braes of Yarrow.

Thy steed is fainting with the chase,
Thy boldest hound with flying;
Oh let the stag win out the race,
And find his doe ere dying!

Come rest thee in my greenwood bower
And on my bosom slumber,
I'll bind thy brow with opiate flower
Till sleep thy eyelids cumber.

Give o'er the chase a maid doth pray,
For thee, her heart is pining;
Whate'er you ask, she'll not gainsay
When in her arms reclining.

Oh, a maiden's heart is breaking,
Her brow death-white with sorrow;
For her no happy waking,
For her no glad tomorrow!

VI

The echoes long had sunk to rest,
And sleep each yeoman's brow had pressed,
When from some far monastic cell
Was heard the tolling midnight bell.
The chieftain started with the sound,
And shiv'ring rose from off the ground.
His hand he pressed o'er brow and face
As if to clear the time and place;
Then closer drew his ample plaid,
And nervous hastened down the glade,

Where fed the horses in the shade.
Here quiet reigned and all was well;
But sleep had lost her potent spell.
His mind reverted to the morn,
His sleeping bride and their first-born;
The Douglas' crime, his wrongs, his vow,
Like some wild tide rush o'er him now.

VII

“Fools, fools we are to madly prate
And childlike some huge bubble blow,
Just for the cunning hand of Fate
To grasp and jesting overthrow!
Lured by ambition's mocking spell,
What vast emprises we'd compel,
What uncurbed rivers we would chain,
What mountains sink, plough up what plain,
What tides and tempests we would bind;
Yet lo, a mote — the eye is blind;
A crumb misplaced — we gasping choke;
A scratch, a prick — life's dam is broke,
The flood outpours; the noblest breed
Becomes a spoil where maggots feed! —
The air grows chill; some blinding doom
Seems rising through the thick'ning gloom;
Huge shadows take a fearful shape
And stifle me with swathing crape.—
Ellen, I come! Oh God, methinks
I stand upon the sloping brink
Of an unmeasured yawning pit
Before whose mouth vast shadows flit;
And groping down the slippery ledge
I peer below the crumbling edge,
Where my uncertain eyes behold
Thy upturned face in deathdamp cold;
Thy form across a mound of stones

With rainwashed skulls and bleaching bones :
Thy helpless arms, upstretched, beseech,
Oh God ! beyond my utmost reach.

Each time thy hand I seek to clasp,
I feel some demon's choking grasp.
My name, thy white lips ceaseless moan
Until my eyes seem fiery stone.—
Oh Hell, what monster grips thy hair
And drags thee naked to his lair !
Avaunt ! 'Tis some dark dream ; I wake,
Th' oppressing spell begins to break.
A shriek ? No, 'tis my Duncan's cry ;
By yon tall pine the camp doth lie.
Yon demon was a gloomy cloud
Whose shadow chilled me as a shroud.
My Ellen doth so sweetly rest
No dream disturbs her peaceful breast.
Yon moon that gilds the river deep,
Doth kiss her lids, now closed in sleep.—
When doubts with premonitions wed
They prostitute the hand and head,
Until we drown in drops of dew,
See clouds when heaven's arch is blue ;
Till action is a long-lost game,
And valor doth forget her name.—
The night creeps on its petty pace,
My untoward steps I'll now retrace.
Let, William, Douglas' Earl beware
How at his hand my kinsmen fare ;
The arm of Robert of Kincaid
Is scarce the arm of errant maid ! ”

VIII

'Twas somewhat past the midday hour,
When Oswald's eye spied Douglas' tower ;
Hugh pile of stone beside the Clyde,

Where flowed and ebb'd the battle's tide,
Till nameless times the sweeping flood
Bore out to sea its freight of blood.
Oh ancient pile, if lips were thine,
What ear so dull 'twould not incline
To list the deeds that thou couldst tell,
Rename each soul that nameless fell !
If every dungeon had a tongue,
What woeful ballads had been sung.—
The clan that morn had mark'd their chief,
Whose brow seem'd trac'd with signs of grief,
Whose features bore the marks of age,
Fresh tokens of the seer and sage ;
And though he seem'd less debonair,
His dark eye show'd the fire still there.
When Robert saw the ancient hold,
His stormy brow grew white and cold,
And pulling on the bridle rein,
He check'd the clan above the plain ;

Then calling Oswald to his side,
He bade him to the castle ride,
And there demand to see the earl,
And to his face this message hurl ; —
“ Release forthwith the chief, Kincaid,
Recall the edict thou hast made,
Renounce thy claim o'er Lorna's glade,
Whose noblest sons defiance fling,
And own no lord save Scotland's king.
Say each doth pledge his life and hand
Now to maintain each just demand.”

IX

With reverent head old Oswald heard
Intent to treasure every word ;
Then wheeling on his charger gray,
With spur and word was soon away,

Now dashing through the scattered trees,
His tartan streaming on the breeze,
Next bounding o'er the rolling plain,
The grim old castle soon doth gain.
Here rising in his stirrups high
As if the keeper to espy,
His bugle to his lips doth bring
And shrills a blast till echoes ring.

The summons brought a motley crowd
Of dogs and men before the gate ;
The warden then appeared in state
And challenged Oswald strong and loud ;
“ Pray, who art thou, what dost thou seek,
What message bring? — Depart or speak ! ”
“ My business, warden 's not with thee,
The Earl of Douglas I must see ; —
The bravest clan in Perth is mine,
On fairer glen sun doth not shine.
Nor stag doth tread a richer glade : —
My chief is Robert of Kincaid.”
The warder beckoned to his squire,
Who turned to list, then did retire.
A statue on a sculptured steed —
Yet Oswald's eye to all gave heed.
Until what seemed a needless wait,
The squire appeared before the gate.
The warder signaled where he stood,
When raised the ponderous gate of wood,
Then slowly down the drawbridge falls.
The warder now to Oswald calls ; —
“ Advance ! The noble earl would hear
What folly makes you thus appear.”

X

No monarch of the mountain side
That leads the herds through forests wide,

Wore prouder front than Oswald when
He rode into the Douglas' den.
As through the massive arch he passed,
No furtive look he backward cast,
Nor when he heard the huge gate fall
That oft the stoutest heart did pall.
When once the court yard he did gain
He gave a page the bridle rein ;
Paused just to rub the noble grey
Who answered with a grateful neigh,
Then followed mute behind his guide
Until they reached the court's far side ;
Here entering a commodious room,
The meeting place of squire and groom,
They passed on to a dim lit hall
Where, hung upon each ancient wall,
Were trophies of the field and chase,
With relics of an earlier race ;
Skins that the bear or wolf had worn
Hung peaceful by the red deer's horn.
This battered shield with fatal dent
Shows how the tide at Falkirk went ;
That mighty axe, so legends say,
At Bannockburn, helped win the day.

XI

They halted by a carven door
And signed the page who stood before,
When as the door turned on its hinge
Old Oswald felt his muscles twinge
With something scarce akin to fear —
The moment fast was drawing near
When Earl of Douglas he should face.
He crossed ; the door swung back to place,
And through the windows' dusty glow,
He saw a man pace to and fro ;

A man whose sword made orphans wail,
A man whose eye made princes quail,
A man the king himself did fear,
A man deep hated far and near,—
A man who dared confederate
With Ross and Crawford 'gainst the State.—
With strong arms folded on his breast,
He midway paused, perchance to rest,
As eagles balance on the wing
Ere on their prey they downward spring;
Then wheeling on his iron-shod heel,
His eye, blue grey as tempered steel,
On Oswald fell. His brow grew dark;
The smould'ring ire at length took spark;—

XII

“Speak, caitiff, say what brings thee here!
Of broken laws has thou no fear?
Say that thy chief would leave the glade,
My cattle steal, my yeoman raid!
Art dumb; what message dost thou bring?
Or by St. Fillan thou shalt swing!”
Old Oswald faced the earl unmoved,
And well that day his valor proved:—
“My lord, a man unused to Courts am I;
With grace nor wit shall I reply.
The blade than tongue I readier use,
And so my speech may you amuse.
I've come you've heard from Lorna's glade;
My chief is Robert of Kincaid —
Brave son of him, you know too well,
Lies chained in some foul dungeon cell.
I do not sue, I now demand
You free those limbs, unbind that hand,
Revoke those laws in madness made,
Renounce all claim o'er Lorna's glade.

This I demand in Kincaid's name ;
You know the justice of the claim."

XIII

When Oswald spoke the word "demand",
The Douglas clinched his sword in hand,
And ill suppressed the rising storm
That quivered through his massive form.
A dangerous smile played o'er his face
As lightnings round a dark cloud chase ;—
"And so the hawk that 'scapes its cage
Would dare the eagle's baffled rage ;
So prowling wolves would lions be,
And cattle thieves dictate to me !
Ye gods, indeed it doth amuse !—
Suppose obedience I refuse
This would-be lordling, pray what then ?
Shall I be haled to Lorna's glen ?"
"My Earl of Douglas, it were best
To know this is no maiden's jest.
Oh trifle not a son's just hate !
On yonder hill my chief doth wait
Who longs to meet thee in the field,
Or try his lance upon thy shield.—
The falcon hath a tireless wing,
And Scotland still doth boast a king !"

XIV

When Douglas heard the threat implied
No hand could stem the wrathful tide ;—
"Back, caitiff, to thy wretched glen !
What, dare a Douglas in his den !
Release Kincaid ? His bones shall rot,
His very name shall be forgot !
So Scotland has a king ! Thou churl,
Remember Douglas has an earl

Whose word within these walls is law !
Beware who plagues the lion's paw ;
The fox had better watch its lair
Than trespass on the lion's fare !
'Twere better far, thy master tell,
To challenge thus the Prince of Hell !—
Away, begone ! lest thou wouldst sleep
In yonder dungeon's darkest keep !
Ho, guard ! This yeoman show his steed,
Let drop the bridge, then bid him speed.”
As toward the door old Oswald turned
He ill-controlled the ire that burned,—
“ Proud Earl, beware, 'tis no long tale
Ere Kincaid's arm thy cheek shall pale !”

XV

When Oswald reached his charger's side,
He grasped the mane and leaped astride,
His huge frame trembling like the oak
O'er which the storm its fury broke.
As on the bridge his grey did tread,
He turned and to the Douglas said :—
“ The future holds a heavy day
When blood for blood thou shalt repay !”
Then tight'ning on his charger's rein
He spurred back o'er the rolling plain.

XVI

The chief scarce heard old Oswald through,
When from its sheath his broadsword flew,
And holding high the blade, he cried :—
“ Woe me, if I these insults bide ;
My heart be food for boasting wren ;
Mount, follow, sons of Lorna's glen.”
Once more a ride across the plain,
Once more the castle's gate they gain,

Once more a summons loud and shrill,
Once more old Bluff demands their will;
When Kincaid doth in stirrups rise
And answering, to the warder cries,—
“Ho, knave, thy master bid appear,
Or hide in shame and live in fear!
Say Robert son of brave Kincaid
Makes good his word with lance or blade.”
The warder beckoned to a churl
Who quick returned with Douglas’ Earl;
And passion lit the earl’s dark eye
As lightning lights the midnight sky;
Nor tiger foamed with fiercer rage
Than Douglas in the warder’s cage;—
“What means this insult, brigand chief?
A Douglas treat with cattle thief!
Back, or I’ll hang thee and thy beast
Where crows shall on thy carrion feast!”
“My lord of Douglas,” the chief replied,
“Think you that threats will turn the tide?
Think you my blood is milk of doe,
My passion but an April snow?—
If thou art earl in else than name
Then blades, not words, should be the game;
If Douglas blood course through thy vein,
Dare prove it on the open plain!
Release my father at this gate—
Or Scotland’s king shall arbitrate!”
At this the clan withdrew not quite
The distance of an arrow’s flight.

XVII

Young Harold, favorite of the earl,
Of noble brow and sunny curl,
Did then the Douglas hotly urge
To let him straight the insult purge;

And smarting 'neath the stinging taunt,
Permission did the Douglas grant.
A moment more, the signal shrill,
A moment more, the court doth fill
With knight and squire, and restless steeds,
Which cavalcade young Harold leads,
Firm seated on the sturdy back
Of his well-groomed and peerless black;
Strong armor guards his knightly form —
Oh may it guard his life blood warm!
The drawbridge falls across the moat,
Upon the breeze the banners float,
While through the gate the troopers trot
Until they reach the grassy plot,
Where Lorna's clan impatient wait,
Regardless of their doom or fate.
Young Harold, slightly in advance,
Now curbed his steed and couched his lance.
His ringing voice then woke the deep
Where echoes are supposed to sleep:—
“Ha, chief, come forth and prove thy word,
No carpet knight thy boastings heard!”

XVIII

The youth's fair brow did Kincaid note,
His brawny arm, hugh chest and throat;
The coat of mail his steady eye
Surveyed, and did each joint espy;
Marked now the steed the knight bestrode
Was larger than the bay he rode.—
His Duncan was of lighter mould,
A breed of hunters, famed of old,
Of cleaner limbs and finer head,
At every point a thoroughbred.
The knight had scarce the challenge made,
Ere Robert left the cavalcade,

And rode out on the plot between
The facing clans upon the green,
Till half a bowshot from the black
When this reply he sallied back ;—
“ Knave, who art thou? Where hides the earl
That he must send an o’ergrown churl?
Come on! For Hell is gaping wide;
Urge on thy steed, and thither ride!”
At that did Harold spur the black —
Unmoved, the chief on Duncan’s back.

Now leaning o’er the steed’s dark crest,
The lance well gripped and in the rest,
The mailed knight did thund’ring ride,
Like some huge pine the rushing tide
Hurls crashing on the silent rock,
That threat’ning waits to greet the shock.
Woe, woe to him who bars the way —
His blood shall drench the gory clay!
Just ere the goal did Harold gain,
The chieftain pulled on Duncan’s rein;
No stag had quicker leaped aside.
Its fatal aim the lance shot wide,
Nor scarcely grazed the ready shield,
When on his horse the chieftain wheeled;
Like lightning flashed his sword on high,
And smiting down, cleft Harold’s thigh.
A ruddy stream leaps from the wound;
And faint, the knight falls to the ground.
A moment paused the raven steed,
Then neighing turned, and back did speed.
The clan’s shrill yell then rent the air,
And woke the wolf within his lair.

XIX

Scarce had the black regained the train,
The drawbridge trembled ’neath the strain

Of mounted horse that thundered o'er,
And down the slope a whirlwind bore.
The Douglas hoste did open wide,
And through their ranks a knight did ride;
With gleaming axe swung o'er his head,
It seemed that hate and death had wed.
A ringing voice was heard to cry,—
“Ho, chief, revenge! give way or die!”
The chieftain saw the knight advance,
And grasping well his trusty lance,
He cried, “O laggard, thou art late!
Yet come and share thy vassal's fate!”
Then as the knight did reach the plain,
He gave the noble bay full rein.
It seemed some vengeful demon rode
Behind the steed each one bestrode,
And lashed it with a lash of fire
Till each partook its rider's ire.
The knight dashed midway 'cross the space
Until he saw his foe's dark face,

When towering high above his steed,
He hurled his axe, as well he need;
Scarce had it swept half way its arc,
When Kincaid's lance shot to its mark.
Oh, but the chieftain's aim was sure;
No knight his lance-thrust could endure!
Well may the shaft bend with the strain;
It brings a Douglas to the plain!
A silence while the knights engage —
Such as precedes Thor's cry of rage;
The god's wrath next all echoes drown,
As some proud oak falls crashing down.
His squires now spurred to Douglas' side,
Who, rising like a mad bull, cried,—
“Back knaves, back vassals, one and all —
Come you to shame a Douglas' fall!

And thou Kincaid shalt dearly pay
The seeming glory of this day !”
“ Earl Douglas ” did the chief reply,
While dangerous gleamed his flashing eye,
“ On that glad day when next we meet,
But one shall live to boast defeat.
Harm but my father, ha, dost start?
This blade shall find thy boasting heart !”

XX

The shadows long had crept apace
As Lorna’s clan their way retrace ;
But darker than the shades did fall,
A gloom pervaded Douglas Hall ;
Ay, darker than the dungeon well,
That gloom upon the Douglas fell.

PART III

I

ELLEN'S LULLABY

The moon is rising o'er the pine,
The deep blue lake is still,
Ten thousand stars in glory shine
On Lorna's glen and hill.

The flocks are sleeping in the fold,
The thrush upon her nest,
And I my nestling safely hold
And warm upon my breast.

Oh, hush each wild and rude alarm,
To Mother Mary pray,
Her image keeps my babe from harm,
By night as well as day !

My bonnie bairn, why tremble so?
Nought but a door doth creak ;
What though the rising night wind blow
And through the forest shriek ?

What though the raven three times call,
The death hound mournful bay,
When Mary's image guards us all,
And keeps us safe till day !

Then slumber on thy mother's arm,
Thy cheek upon her breast,
Her plaid shall fold thee close and warm,
And nought shall thee molest !

II

When she had sung her lullaby,
Her little bairn asleep did lie ;

And then as Ellen turned to pray
A shadow on her bosom lay,
Until it seemed its thick'ning gloom,
Would stifling fill the airy room.
And when she sought the bed's repose,
Her feverish lids refused to close.—
As Ellen restless lay awake,
She heard across the quiet lake
The red deer calling to his doe,
And caught the answer clear and low.
Oh cruel was the hand of Fate
That tore her from beside her mate !—
But hark ! A cry rings through the glen —
A moment more, that cry again
Told that the foe besieged the gate ;
Foretold the doom that did await.
In agony doth Ellen call,
Then clasp her babe and swooning fall.

III

Oh woe to him that humbles pride,
But doth not stem its vengeful tide !
Oh galling was the overthrow
That laid the earl before his foe ;
Twice bitter was the keen disgrace
That did his arrogance abase !
Swift vengeance swore he on Kincaid,
And quickly planned a midnight raid.—
But it were shame for pen to tell
What fearful deeds that night befell ;
That woful night a doom did fall
On Lorna's glen and Kincaid's Hall ;
And long before the glow of morn
Red lurid flames the east adorn ;
And when the weary dawn doth break,
No cheery songs the sleeper wake :

But smoking wall of cot and shed,
While here and there the kine lie dead.
Where are the matrons, where the maids?
Like hunted deer the deepest glades
They sought, and there in terror hide
Till Lorna's clan shall homeward ride.

IV

The harper heard fair Ellen scream,
And waking from some troubled dream,
All reckless of his chilling years,
He hastens where the noise he hears.
Too late he reached the plundered nest,
The thieves had robbed it of its best,
And guilty bore the fainting prize
Before the old man's glowing eyes;
His blade from out his sheath he flung,
And vengeful on the foremost swung.
But how could valor linked to age
With youth and brawn hope to engage?
Oh could Time's tide have backward rolled,
Another tale had now been told!
Unequal was the struggle then —
For what could one opposed to ten?
That shrunken arm did parry well,
But age at length began to tell;
The blows were plying fast and hard,
A sweeping stroke beat down his guard;
A feint, and then a savage thrust —
The minstrel's blood now stains the dust.
In vain for succor Ellen cries,
They bear away the tender prize,
And ere the sun that night grew cold,
Fair Ellen lay in Douglas' hold.

V

Although his wound scarce gave him pain,
That night the earl wooed sleep in vain.
His knights and squires, how could he face,
'Fore whom he'd brooked such foul disgrace!
His fevered mind then roamed the past
When love's elusive spell was cast,
And led to many a bootless chase
Whose quarry was a witching face.
Again he saw the humble knee,
Again he made the ardent plea,
Again he heard the bitter fate
From lips that smiling said, "Too late";
And he an Earl! It passed belief—
Rejected for a Highland chief!
The maid who dared an earl refuse
None other was than Ellen Bruce.
So Douglas' Earl paced to and fro,
His stubborn head now bended low,
His rugged hands oft clenched his throat,
Again each other fiercely smote,
And told a woful shipwreck tale—
Of reefs of pride, and passion's gale;
And as he felt the seething tide,
In bitter scorn, the Douglas cried:—

VI

"Oh Fate, that honors but to shame,
Makes men her playthings and her game;
That lets us climb heights that appal
To mock us as we headlong fall;
At dawn, a kingdom do we warn,
Her knights and peers we jesting scorn,
At noon, reject the proffered crown—
Ere night, a maid doth laugh us down!—

Ah laugh me down ! That laugh did breed
A poison that my hate did feed ;
The days are sheathed and bound is years,
The sowing's o'er, the harvest nears ;
To-night she wakes in yonder tower,
To-night she knows a Douglas' power !
Ha, ha, Kincaid, how now, how now !
The foot this time is on whose brow ?
And yet how oft this stormy heart
Before her glance would stop and start ;
These lips from youth wont to command
Must tremble when they touched her hand,
Until methought I loved that maid,
And, fortune had not been a jade —
Away ! Love's but a sugared name
That tempts us from life's bitter game ;
'Tis lasting as an April frost,
Neath passion's fire 'tis melted, lost ! —
Enough ! — she shall be guarded well,
But by the powers of Earth and Hell,
Ere Kincaid look upon her face
Well shall he pay my foul disgrace !”

VII

Upon the morn of that sad day,
The room where Ellen sleepless lay,
Though bolt and bar did guard it well,
Was far removed from dungeon cell.
Its furniture grown dark with age
Might rouse the musings of a sage.
'Twas rumored that this massive chair
Had one time held a princess fair ;
While on that richly carven bed,
Where slumbered oft a princely head,
One night a legend doth endure
There slept a king and paramour.

And were it not those bars of steel
Its guest indeed might truly feel
That she were Douglas' favored guest,
And honored with the castle's best.

VIII

Fair Ellen lay disconsolate,
And bitter mourned her cruel fate,
Until a knock upon the door;
A step then crossed the oaken floor
And as she raised her weary head,
The keeper bowing, to her said:
"The earl craves madam to award
An audience to the castle's lord."
Her blue eyes on the speaker fell
Who seemed to shrink beneath their spell; —
"Earl Douglas craves, the Douglas sues!
'Tis now o'er late that I refuse;
How can I grant, or how deny
While I a captive helpless lie?
What Douglas will within this wall
How little can my word forestal!
Say that his pleasure I await,
And joy to learn whate'er my fate."

IX

But as the keeper turned to go,
Her tide of life seemed ebbing low,
And when he closed and barred the door,
It seemed that tide would flow no more.
On lip and cheek a pallor lay
Far whiter than the breaker's spray.
Yet scarcely did the panel close
When Ellen clasped her heart and rose;
With woman's fear she called a truce;

Again the royal blood of Bruce
Brought courage to her wounded heart,
And nerved her well to play her part;
Then as she pushed her careless hair
Off from that brow so cold and fair,
And slowly faced the opening door,
No queen more tragic air e'er wore.
Then through the open portal came
The man that bore the castle's name,
In silence paused, and standing there
He motioned Ellen to a chair;
And when his steady eye had read
Each potent sign, he slowly said : —

X

"Think not I come to use my power;
'Tis not the place, the time or hour.
Scarce have I dreamed since that lost day
A Bruce beneath this roof should stay."
"A Bruce! Dost think I'm still a maid?
I glory in the name Kincaid;
Forego those words thou dost not feel,
Pray let thy speech my fate reveal.
I know thy thought, I know thy heart;
Knowst thou, that I shall play my part!"
"Madam, these words of mine betray
My inmost thought as yon clear ray
Reveals this room. Misjudge me not —
Though one dark day I've scarce forgot,
Think not 'gainst thee, I've nursed a hate
That brought about this untoward fate.

Curse as I have the name Kincaid,
Swear as I did upon this blade
To blot and tear that hated name
From out the book of Scotland's fame,
Still ringing in my ears I heard

That other unforgotten word;
That name that emblemed hope and bliss —
Now forged like hilt and blade with his.
And when for vengeance I have cried,
That name did suage my wounded pride,
Till high resolves bore sterile seed,
And vows no longer bred the deed.
Then Kincaid dared a Douglas' wrath,
And fury's hounds fell on his path.
If there is aught, forgive — " "Forgive!
First make my murdered baby live;
Rebuild those walls now black and low,
Mute witness of my speechless woe!
Forgive! And I that chieftain's wife!
Ask first my honor and my life!"

XI

O'er Douglas' brow now formed a cloud
Far blacker than a funeral shroud;
"Enough?" he cried, "the dream doth break,
The shadows pass, and I awake.
I proffered peace; thou mocked with scorn,
From this and hate, revenge is born!
Thy fiery words my heart have steeled,
Whose iron once would bend and yield.
Know that thy chieftain lives — as yet —
Ay lives, till on his heart I whet
The fury of this hate — " "Proud earl,
From Heaven's wall a King did hurl
A rebel Prince to deepest Hell!
Know Scotland hath a king; think well!
I shall forefend the pending storm —
Yet shall I clasp my chieftain's form,
Yet Douglas, shall I soothe his brow!
I've sworn 't, and Heaven hears my vow!"
As Douglas faced the door to go,

He turned and said in accents low : —
“ Thinkst thou that threats shall thwart my will ?
Know, madam, I am Douglas still.
Though all of Scotland on me wait,
It shall not stay thy chieftain’s fate ! ”

XII

The door swung to ; bolts shot to place.
As to and fro the guard did pace,
He heard a shriek that chilled the stars,
But ere he could undo the bars,
A woman’s voice in song arose
Whose wailing notes his courage froze ;
It seemed it was some lost soul’s breath
That echoed from the hills of death.

XIII

THE SONG

My little rose is blighted,
The rose I once delighted,
 All too soon ;
Life’s silken skein is tangled,
Her happy bells are jangled,
 Out of tune.

They say love’s crown is shattered,
The golden veil is tattered
 Long ere noon ;
Oh rose, my rose in sorrow,
To be forgot to-morrow —
 Oh what a blessed boon !

PART IV

I

Now that the chief unhorsed the Earl,
The clan its streaming flags unfurl,
And as their steeds they homeward turn,
With loud huzzas the Douglas spurn.
Nor did they pause to feed or rest,
Till long the sun had gilt the west.
Elate, they travelled toward the north;
Until they reached the wooded Forth;
And there within the friendly shade
Of a secluded neighboring glade,
The chieftain bade the men alight
And there encamp them for the night.
In vain that night the chief would sleep;
The drowsy honrs would halting creep,
While on the ground he restless lay
And waited for the laggard day.
The longest trail at last will end,
The tallest pine to earth will bend;
The highest tide at last ebbs low,
The spring sometime will cease to flow;
The longest night at last is o'er,
And sunrise breaks on Forth's fair shore.

II

Upon the sward the sunbeams dance,
Each grass blade shines a jewelled lance;
When through the mists a form appears;
Scanned by each face it slowly nears,
And as it hastes with broken stride,
One arm hangs helpless at the side,
The cloak is stained with gore and mud,
The beard once white is drenched with blood.

The clan now stare with wond'ring eyes,
And scarce their harper recognize.
As in their ready arms he falls,
For Lorna's chief he feebly calls.
Now Robert clasps the fainting seer,
And whispers words of welcome cheer,
Then bathes that brow, those fevered lips,
Binds up the gaping wound that drips.
At length life's ebbing tide returns;
An afterglow in each eye burns
As to the chief he doth relate
The story of his woful fate.
Thrice as he told the direful tale
Life's feeble current seemed to fail.
Mute, bent the chief to catch each word,
While tree and sky seemed dim and blurred;
Then as the harper neared the close,
He slowly to his feet arose,
And leaning 'gainst the chieftain's breast,
He thus the list'ning clan addressed : —

III

“ Oh Lorna's clan, oh gallant men,
Who love your homes and love your glen,
How can you ever sheathe the blade
While lives a foe who marred your glade !
Avenge, avenge the coward deed,
And for each dead make twenty bleed ;
Oh rid the land at one sure blow
Of Lorna's curse, of Scotland's foe !
For me, nor son, nor daughter grieves —
The aged tree is bare of leaves ;
My years are white with winter's snow,
And yet me feels the zephyrs blow
From some far field I cannot see,
Deep boweréd in eternity.

My path hath led me to that gate
That somewhere each one doth await ;
And now I see it open wide,
Though what lies on the other side
I little know — yet have no fear ;
God is the same, or there or here.”

IV

He paused ; his face turns ashen pale,
His aged limbs beneath him fail ;
When unheard voices rouse his ear,
When unseen throngs 'fore him appear ;
And battling 'gainst the fatal tide,
He half uprose, and feebly cried : —
“ Ho, Ellen ! quick, my harp now bring ;
A song of victory must I sing ;
Oh haste ! the clans are gathered here,
I see their plaids, I hear them cheer. —
Who holds my arm ? What makes me choke !
My harp ! My — Oh — the chords — are — broke !
And I — and I — my song — is — o'er ! ”
And Lorna's Harper spake no more.

V

The chief bent o'er the lifeless form,
A moment pressed that brow still warm,
And said : — “ Old friend, thy soul shall guide
My bairn's frail craft on death's dark tide.”
Then rising up with misty eyes,
To all the clan the chieftain cries : —
“ Draw near, and form the holy square ;
Let every man his broadsword bare ;
Now on each blade, thy vengeance swear ! ”
The men obeyed, and nothing loath
Each clansman took the sacred oath.
Again he spoke : — “ Bear home the dead !
'Tis fit that death and ruin wed.

The blackened walls shall be his pyre,
And smould'ring roofs shall feed the fire !
Go, Lorna's sons ; keep well the glen !
I seek the king, nor come again
Until to say, 'The tyrant sleeps
Whose red hand made the orphan weep,'
Till meeting Douglas face to face,
This blade hath purged our foul disgrace."

VI

The sun just marked the midday hour,
When Kincaid spied old Stirling's tower
That rose beside the lordly Forth,
The pride and bulwark of the North.
And ere the shadows eastward swing
The chieftain stood 'fore Scotland's king,
The youthful king at length surveyed
The noble form beneath the plaid.
The chieftain's name seemed to awake
Some memory, as the monarch spake :
"Kincaid ! Methinks I know the name ;
A chief in Perth did bear the same ;
A valiant man who helped run down
The fiends that wrecked my father's crown.
Dost know the chief ?" "Know him ! Oh sire,
His blood now sets these veins afire.
My father did thy father's fate
Avenge. I hope 't is not o'er late
His son should seek thy father's son
To right a deed unjustly done ?"
"Methought that debt long since repaid"
Said James, "With gold sent to the glade.
But kings are thought to hold the key
That opes a bursting treasury.
What sorry wrong doth hurt thee now ;
Hath some one stol'n thy new milch cow ?"

VII

“My liege, ’t is not of cattle thieves
I speak, unless each son that grieves
And chafes against that iron hand
Must bear the sluggish oxen’s brand !”
“Speak not in parables, be brief !”
“I will, — that master cattle thief
Is William, Douglas’ Earl —” “A plague
On thee,” the monarch cried, “Why drag
Before me like a hellish fate
That name of names thou knowst I hate !
Away ! Thy feuds upon thy head —
Those thorns that deck a monarch’s bed !”
“My king, you do me grievous wrong.
Have Ross and Douglas grown so strong
That Scotland’s King pales at a name,
And fears unfold a deed of shame !
“Methought the king would lend his eye
And mark the accusing arrow fly,
However lofty be its aim,
However dangerous the game !”
Hot flushed the monarch’s boyish cheek,
As he controlled himself to speak : —
“Proceed ! The king forgets the sting
Thy kind insinuations bring.
The poorest peasant in this realm
May heap his wrongs, though they o’erwhelm
The crown. The king so loves, you know,
To share his children’s yoke of woe.
Proceed ; the arraigning shaft let fly
Wherever may the quarry lie !
Proceed !” “My liege, I wronged thee, and
I crave forgiveness at thy hand.”
“’T is past ; go on !”

VIII

THE CHIEFTAIN'S STORY

“No fireside tale
I speak to make some fair maid pale.
Since first my father was the head
Of Lorna, and her forays led,
His loyalty to Scotland's king
Has been untarnished as this ring.
The Douglas rule he oft denied,
And fearful viewed his growing pride
That like some swelling torrent bore
And menaced all who stood before;
Unless the flood, some royal hand
Should bind, ere it o'erwhelmed the land. —
My father's course the Douglas vexed,
Who sought to find some vain pretext
To seize the chief, that dared defy
And laugh a Douglas in the eye.
The time did come a year ago,
As Kincaid bent his trusty bow
On deer the Douglas claimed to own.
He seized the chief who fought alone; —
If still he breathes, it is the cold
And festered air of Douglas' hold.

But two days since, with threescore men
I left my home and native glen.
I sought the Earl and did demand
That he release my father's hand,
Renounce all claim o'er Lorna's glade,
Or dare to meet me blade to blade.
My righteous claim the Douglas spurned,
And all his venom on me turned.
We met; and 'fore the knights around
I forced the Earl from horse to ground.
That night dire vengeance Douglas planned;

To Lorna's glade he sent his band.
Where happy homes did greet the eye,
Now blackened walls stare at the sky.
Oh sire, bear with me now I pray,
If woman's weakness I betray.
We both are in our May of life;
Your liege doth boast a noble wife, —
I, too, did claim a hand more dear
To me than music to the ear,
Than light on which my sad eyes feast,
Or prayer to holy nun or priest.
My sweet flower, Douglas seized, and tore
Its roots from out my heart's red core!
You have an heir — I had a son.
What price shall pay the ruin done!"

IX

JAMES

"Enough! Were Douglas ten times more
Than e'er his bravest hopes dared soar,
He should account himself to me
And make a bounteous remedy!
Remain 'neath Stirling's roof to-night,
And sure as morning's dawn brings light
Thy noble wife and misused sire
Shall greet thee by this very fire.
The morn shall see Sir Patrick Gray,
Thy father's cousin, on his way
With mandate for the twain's release;
When he returns, thy woes shall cease."

X

Next morn the Captain of the Guard
His faithful steed was spurring hard;
When noon was marked on Heaven's dial,
He spied old Lanark's massive pile.

Arriving 'fore the cumbrous hold,
He signalled to the warder old,
Who raised the ponderous gate of wood,
And soon before the Earl he stood.

As Douglas recognized his face,
He smiled and said with pleasing grace : —
“ I welcome thee, Sir Patrick Gray ;
Old Time has wheeled a sinuous way
Since last thy rugged face I scanned,
And grasped thee by thy honest hand ;
Ay, since his Majesty did deign
To send such guest to entertain.”
“ My lord, your welcome honors me
Far more than I deserve to be.
I come on business from the king,
Who ordered me this letter bring.”
As clouds will cross a June-day sky
A doubt flashed o'er the Douglas' eye.
“ Your pardon, Captain, my repast
I have just done, while yet you fast.
To press at once thy mission's aim,
The while thy paunch played rebel's game,
Were more ungallant, far, indeed,
Than race a lean and well-fed steed.
Partake my meat, imbibe my wine,
And then to business we'll incline.”

XI

Thus urged, he scarcely could refuse.
Well Douglas proved he could amuse
With mirthful tale and quip and jest,
And princely entertain his guest.
Yet as each tale he did relate
He pondered o'er affairs of State ;
And laughing at some merry jest,
The captain's mission Douglas guessed.

He called a lackey standing near,
Whispered an order in his ear;
Then as the meal drew to a close,
The earl half smiling did propose
A health to Fate that thus did bring
His guest as envoy from the king;
Then to the business' happy end
Another health its cheer did lend.
This done Sir Patrick handed o'er
The mandate from the king he bore;
The Douglas slowly read it through;
No furtive sign revealed he knew
Or guessed the message he had read.
As they arose, he smiled and said:—
“A weighty debt I owe to you
Who bear from James such gracious news;
His fair request, I glad obey—
Unless some higher power gainsay.”

XII

Sir Patrick took the proffered arm;
No shadow did his soul alarm.
Descending to the lawn before
The stairway from the hall's broad door,
They saw a mantle there outspread,
By which they paused; the Douglas said:—
“I fear, Sir Knight, you're somewhat late;
Swift falls the cunning knife of Fate;
For sleeps upon this velvet bed—
Kincaid” (he raised the robe of red)
“But ah! He seems to lack—a head!
Perhaps while dallying o'er our wine,
The old chief paid the tapster's fine!”
“My noble Earl, take care what jest
You play upon your former guest!”
“There, there, be calm; what is, must be.”

The joke your king can not but see.
The carcass, pray, would fatten crows! —
Our business now, I see you'd close.

“Thy horse now waits by yonder fount.
We'll thither go. — I prithee mount!
Ah, yes, the king did, too, request
That Ellen cease to be my guest.
I know though loath to lose the fair,
No king would miss a morsel rare.
Sir Knight, you see the postern gates;
There on her palfrey she awaits.
Unto thy trusty gallant hand
I now resign the choice command.
Pray take this lily of the North;
Yet, Patrick, wax not sore or wroth
Should not the flower be overfresh! —
A rose's thorns will mar the flesh;
When lilies, roses do embrace,
The lily should submit with grace;
And he mistakes, who thinks to scorn
The Douglas' rose and 'scape its thorn!”

XIII

His horse Sir Patrick sprung astride,
And leaning toward the earl, he cried: —
“If I survive this day, my lord,
Your work shall reap a sure reward!”
“There lies the gate; Sir Patrick, ride!
Lest it should close on thee inside.
Tell James how sorely I did try
With his fair pleasure to comply.”

XIV

The faithful knight did then convey
His woful charge the weary way
That 'twixt the distant castles lay.

Arriving at old Stirling's door,
He gives the bruised flower he bore
Into the queen's most tender care,
Who wept to see a wreck so fair.
Then sought the king, and worn and pale
Did tell his mission's wretched tale.

Intent James listened to each word ;
And each disgrace, he trembling heard,
Did fan the kindled fires of wrath
That menaced all who barred their path ;
And when the knight of Ellen spoke,
The king his threat'ning silence broke : —
“ Fiend, who helpless innocence defiles,
Who outrage upon insult piles,
Look well ! The mountain of thy crime,
On which thou dost aspire to climb
And seize a throne, the king displace,
Is toppling on its rotten base !
Beware, thou banqueter of blood,
Thou dost not loose a dooming flood
Whose hot red waves shall drag thee down !
What ! Douglas jeer the Stuart's crown !
By Heaven, he answers me — or Hell
Shall deck me with a jester's bell ! ”

XV

Next day a messenger was sent,
Who from the king to Douglas went ;
A mandate did the envoy bear
That bade the earl forthwith repair
To Stirling's castle on the Clyde,
Where Scotland's Court did then abide.
The messenger did also bring
Safe conduct signed by James as king.
When Douglas read both papers through,
His swarthy forehead knotted grew,

And turning with impatient tread,
He stopped where Harold stood and said : —
“So, ho ! They think to silence fear ;
And so sweet words the mandate smear.
Methinks I see shrewd Crichton’s hand
Behind the scenes so nicely planned.
Ah, Chancellor, thou’d best take care
When foxes would a lion snare !
What, touch the person of an earl ?
The flag of civil strife unfurl !
No ! James, though more than half a fool,
Is not so plastic weak a tool
To wage a throne upon one throw.”

Harold:

“Yet think you, Earl, ’t were wise to go ? ”
“Go ! go ! Ay, Douglas’ earl should go,
Though Stirling’s hall should choke and swell
With hired assassins fresh from hell !
When flesh and blood this hand appal,
Then let the House of Douglas fall !
But ere that sorry day shall break
Old Scotland from her sloth shall wake,
And recognize her rightful king ; —
Yet, yet, the sceptre Fate shall bring ! ”

XVI

“I hope, my lord, the day is near.”
“Ay, Harold ; yet sometimes I fear. —
Oh list ! Last night I dreamed I stood
Upon a cliff that had withstood
The wreck of time, and rose beside
Some unknown stormy tide.
The gloomy ocean waste I scanned
Until methought a shadowy hand
Bore upward through the mist that gleamed
And mutely proffered me what seemed

A crown of some fair paradise,
Whose radiant beauty seared my eyes.

“As o’er the cliff I then did peer,
The burning crown seemed tempting near;
But as far down the ledge I crept,
An angel’s wing did intercept
The gift supreme; and when I tried
To push the blood-red wing aside,
Oh God, I saw the angel’s face,
And shrieking fell through endless space, —
And woke. Oh, those reproachful eyes
Yet seem to stay a kingdom’s prize!”

“My lord, the dream were strange indeed,
Yet fears from phantoms should not breed.
Hast thou forgot Kincaid doth live?”

“Kincaid! I had thought to forgive
The braggart chief. ’Tis not the time;
He fawns on James, and so would climb
To power. I’ll clip the falcon’s wings
And slit the throat that dauntless sings. —
Harold, our steeds! Ay, tempests blow!
Lay forests, towers, and steeples low;
To-night, to Stirling’s Court I go!”

XVII

THE STRICKEN DEER

Within a rare old chamber lay
Poor Ellen near the close of day.
Through gothic windows’ quaint old glass,
Fantastic lights and shadows pass.
The queen’s own maid and nurse attend;
Yet human hands but ill can mend
The hurts that prey upon the mind,
And wounded hearts no lint can bind. —
A foot now echoes on the floor;

A hand is heard upon the door.
The nurse did open it with care,
And saw the chieftain standing there.
She lifts her hand and whispers low : —
“ Take off those boots or walk more slow —
The poor sick child is sleeping now.”
He steps inside, then with a bow
Points toward the door. The nurse well knew
The look and sign, and so withdrew.
The oaken portal then swung to.
As Robert heard the lock's sharp click,
It seemed to stab him to the quick ;

With broken step he left the door
And aged crossed the chamber floor,
Until he reached the bed where lay
His world within that bit of clay.
He stood with head bowed o'er his breast,
On which his folded arms did rest,
A statue, save the heaving breath—
His white drawn face so like to death.

XVIII

At last the troubled sleep did break ;
Like startled fawn did Ellen wake,
And springing from the fevered couch,
Did by the window trembling crouch,
And 'neath the drapery try to hide ;
The while, in plaintive tones she cried : —
“ My pretty flowers, to fade so young !
He tore them from my heart and flung
Them in the dust, and there they lie
So soiled ! Oh there my babies die ! —
I'm cold ! Oh how the wind doth blow ;
The rain beats in upon me so !
Just see, my cheeks are dripping wet ! ”

Kincaid:

“Ellen, Ellen, do you forget
This voice that calls thy name in vain,
These eyes that sorrow blinds with pain?”
Like wounded dove her eyes did seek
Unknowing his. Shriek followed shriek:—
“The fiend is come again to seize
My flowers, and let me naked freeze!”

Then pleading, crept and clasped his knees, —
“Be not so cruel, Douglas, please!
My chief, my Robert, no, no, no!
You shall not harm him, Douglas, no!
Curse me, kill me, — but touch him not;
Tear first these arms with tongs red hot!
Pile mountains on me from above,
I’ll gnaw them through and find my love!
I beg, oh beg of you just let
Me touch his hand with mine and wet
My burning lips upon his cheek —
Just once; then stab me ere I speak!”
The chief then loosed her death-like grasp,
And to his heart did straining clasp
The helpless form, yet no word spoke,
But softly did the white brow stroke;
Then laid her on the spotless bed.
Beneath his touch the fever fled,
For as she now unclasped her eyes,
She rising, to him springs and cries:—
“Oh! oh! Heaven breaks! Oh happy morn!
Robert! Robert! I — am — so — tired!”
Her hand that blindly sought his brow
Did helpless drop; nor spoke she now.

XIX

The lifeless form, the chieftain, dazed,
Laid on the bed, then stood and gazed
As one who saw the last star's light
Burn out, and leave eternal night.
A mighty tremor shook his form,
As some huge oak outlives the storm;
One haunting look his eyes did take,
Then, hand on dagger's hilt, he spake : —
“ The ways do part; my path is straight;
Nor life, nor death, nor damning fate
Shall turn or stop me on the way
Till that arch fiend his doom shall pay! —
Oh Hell, thou hast well done thy worst;
'T is life not death that now is cursed!
Pains, fears and tortures, I defy!
My arms embrace thee till I die! —
Oh Ellen, sleep, nor yet awake;
Thy soul, I yet shall overtake! ”

XX

THE DOOM

When Douglas did to Stirling go
He was received with studied show
Of grace by James, who did invite
The earl to dine with him that night.
A royal banquet was outspread,
And merrily the moments sped.
The dinner o'er, the earl arose
And Stuart's health did there propose;
Then to a secret council hall
That fronted Stirling's outer wall,
James and his honored guest withdrew,
And also Grey and Crichton too;
And when did close the oaken door,
A form he had not seen before

Did Douglas note. A black robe fell
From head to foot, concealing well
The one it cloaked, who stood apart
Head bowed, and arms crossed o'er his heart.

XXI

The king and Douglas stood one side
Conversing low, when James replied : —
“ 'Tis not enough that you atone
The bloody crimes you 'fore us own !
I pledge to you my royal word
I scarce believed when first I heard
That Douglas would confederate
And form a league against the State.”
“ My liege, that bond was drawn and signed
'Gainst common enemies combined. —
Each loyal hand that there did guide
The pen, supports the Stuart's side.”
“ Deeds, Douglas, deeds, not high-blown words
Shall be received where subjects erred.
The league must be renounced !” “ ‘ Must,’ sire,
Not ‘ must ’ ! — your leave, and I retire !”
“ Stay, earl ! When treason lurks the land
'Tis time the king should show his hand.
I say that bond shall be renounced —
And first by you ! I have pronounced.”
“ What ! Cries of ‘ Treason ’ ! Coward's name
For deeds that win immortal fame !
Shall Douglas wrong his friend
Because he fears the king offend,
And dare not stay a boyish whim !”

XXII

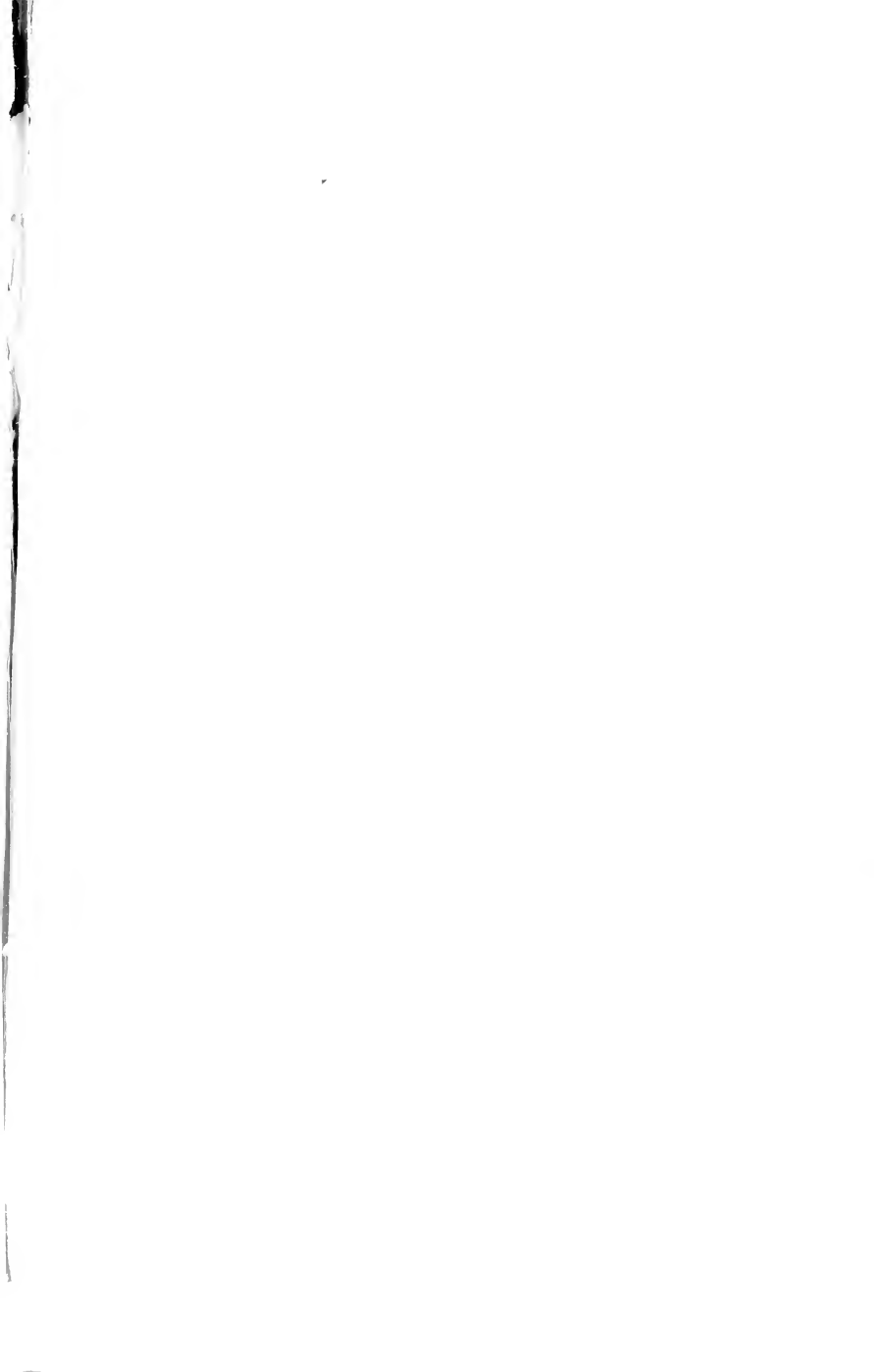
Each face became more dark and grim
As James cried, — “ Ha ! your king defy
And spit upon ! Then, traitor, die !”

But ere the king could make a pass
A mantled form shot through the mass
And cried, — “Back!” “Ha! I see! a plot!
A hired assassin James has got!
Beware! No Douglas ever fell
But dragged his murderer down to Hell!”
Cried Douglas, as he did retreat
Against the farthest window seat.
“Assassin? No! Look on this face!
Draw! draw! Or Hell thou shalt disgrace!”
When vengeance lights the Douglas’ eyes
As “Ha! Kincaid!” he maddened cries.
As James and Grey were pressing near
As if to aid or interfere,
“Stand back! Stand back!” did cry Kincaid —
“His blood would foul a Christian blade;
Back! At thy peril interfere!
His heart is mine — I bought it dear.
Foul monster! I would follow thee
’Cross burning continents, wade seas
Of blood, ere thou should ’scape my hand;
Thou night that darkens all the land!”

XXIII

Though dusk did shroud the fatal hall,
Dark shadows loomed against the wall
As lightning from the blades did flash;
No sound was heard but click and clash.
From each the blood did jet and stream,
Till more like demons they did seem;
And each new gash the blades did make
Some fiercer hate seemed to awake.
Kincaid now made a daring lunge;
Through Douglas’ heart his blade did plunge.
No cry escaped the Douglas’ lips.
The chieftain on the blood now slips,

And to the gory floor he falls ;
He strives to rise, and gasping calls : —
“ 'T is dark — my sword ! — the fiend is low !
Ellen — thy hand — oh ! lead me — oh ! ”
Then spake the king to those around : —
“ Throw out the traitor to the ground !
Now Scotland's rid her greatest foe,
Saved from rebellion's doom of woe.”
Then turning where the chieftain lay ; —
“ There lies within that piece of bleeding clay
A heart whose fellow doth not live to-day ;
A monument his grateful king shall raise,
To unborn ages it shall bear his praise.”



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